



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Great Sand Dunes
National Park and
Preserve

11500 Highway 150
Mosca, Colorado
81146

719-378-6300 phone
719-378-6310 fax

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News Release

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Celebrate National Park Week with Free Admission and Special Events at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, home to the tallest dunes in North America, will celebrate National Park Week, April 16 through 24, 2016. To get the celebration going, Great Sand Dunes will waive entrance fees, throughout this special week (April 16 through April 24). With no entrance fee being charged, it is the perfect time of the year to enjoy a picnic at the dunes parking area, splash in Medano creek, spend the night in Pinon Flats Campground, or rent a sand sled or sand board and experience the dunes in a fun and exciting way. Western National Parks Association (WNPA) will offer 15% discount on all store items (except for stamps) on opening day, April 16. Great Sand Dunes also invites visitors to participate in free events on Saturday, April 16, Wednesday, April 20, and Sunday, April 24.

Saturday, April 16 is “National Junior Ranger Day” and Great Sand Dunes will be launching their new Junior Ranger Explorer Program by leading a free, one-hour hike from the Visitor Center to the dunes starting at 1pm. Visitors who would like to try out the new Junior Ranger Explorer Program are asked to arrive 15 minutes prior to the hike start time to check out a backpack for use on the hike. For more information about this free program, contact the Visitor Center at 719-378-6395 or visit www.nps.gov/grsa.

The Junior Ranger Explorer Program is a free program designed to offer families a new way to explore Great Sand Dunes with no set activities or programs to complete. The idea was developed by an 8-year old Colorado resident who approached Great Sand Dunes Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services, Katherine Faz, with the idea. “What better way to develop the Junior Ranger Program than through the eyes

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of a child who has a deep love and appreciation for the National Park Service and for learning”, says Katherine Faz.

Future junior rangers can check out a backpack, complete with a list of guidelines and ideas, and a set of tools for 2-24 hours from the visitor center and set out on their adventure. The Explorer Program comes with ideas for how to start the adventure – search for magnetite in the dunes, measure wind speed, use binoculars and look for active bird species perched on trees along Montville Trail, or observe constellations in the night sky using a sky chart. Junior rangers will record their observations in a field journal and submit their work to a ranger at the visitor center between 9am and 4:30pm to receive a Junior Ranger badge. The Junior Ranger Explorer Program is graciously supported by Western National Parks Association.

A free demonstration will take place on Wednesday, April 20, “Education Day/Every Kid in a Park” at 11am-12pm and 2pm-3pm at the Visitor Center. Rangers will demonstrate atlatl throwing techniques on the back porch of the Visitor Center. Atlatls are ancient weapons use to hunt Colombian Mammoth that roamed the San Luis Valley over 4,000 years ago. For more information about this free program, contact the Visitor Center at 719-378-6395 or visit www.nps.gov/grsa.

National Park Week celebrations at Great Sand Dunes will conclude with a free, one-hour guided hike along Montville Nature Trail starting at 11am at the trailhead (located across the street from the Visitor Center). The nature hike will focus on the health benefits of spending time outside, edible plants along the trail, and conclude with nature journaling at a scenic overlook of the dunefield. For more information about this free program, contact the Visitor Center at 719-378-6395 or visit www.nps.gov/grsa.

This year’s National Park Week occurs during the National Parks’ year-long 100 year celebration. The Centennial will kick off a second century of stewardship of America’s national parks and engaging communities through recreation, conservation, and historic preservation programs. Great Sand Dunes is one of 411 park units that want their visitors to join the celebration to explore, learn, discover, be inspired, or simply have fun. Keep an eye out for news on upcoming events and activities at Great Sand Dunes. “Great Sand Dunes will be developing activities and events to reach new audiences, while also celebrating the unique connections we have with communities in the San Luis Valley who have been visiting for years”, states Superintendent Lisa Carrico.

For more information about the National Park Service Centennial celebration, visit <http://www.nps.gov/subjects/centennial/index.htm>. The Great Sand Dunes website, Facebook and Instagram page are the best resources to find information on free activities and events promoting the upcoming Centennial, visit www.nps.gov/grsa or follow us at www.facebook.com/greatsanddunesnpp or follow us on Instagram @greatsanddunesnps.

www.nps.gov

About the National Park Service. More than 20,000 National Park Service employees care for America's 411 national parks and work with communities across the nation to help preserve local history and create close-to-home recreational opportunities. Visit us at www.nps.gov, on Facebook www.facebook.com/nationalparkservice, Twitter www.twitter.com/natlparkservice, and YouTube www.youtube.com/nationalparkservice.